

Opportunities for Improving Ridership



A Report by the FTA Ridership Team

August 2005

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Executive Summary

As part of its FY 2005 Strategic Business Plan, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) is working with its partners in the transit industry to increase public transportation ridership by at least 1% nationwide over the previous year. In order to support this critical and challenging goal, the FTA Office of Budget and Policy elected to conduct pilot ridership site visits at two transit agencies that experienced a decrease in ridership during the last two years. The reviews were intended to identify opportunities where improvements in transit ridership could be made and to provide technical assistance to the two transit agencies.

CT Transit - Hartford Division (hereafter, CT Transit) agreed to participate as a pilot transit agency in this national effort. From July 25 – 28, 2005, the first FTA Ridership Team visited Hartford, Connecticut to conduct a comprehensive review of the CT Transit bus system to identify opportunities that may exist for improving ridership. The team was composed of FTA headquarters and regional staff, as well as experts from transit agencies located in California, Connecticut, and Utah.

The Ridership Team members met with CT Transit employees with expertise in each focus area, actively observed bus operations at peak and off-peak travel times, and spoke with operators and members of the riding public. Each team member reviewed one of five functional areas where ridership initiatives could be undertaken: (1) service coverage and routes, (2) fare structures, (3) operations and service quality, (4) marketing, and (5) partnerships.

The following seven key recommendations are among those that resulted from the team's effort. They are expected to support short-term ridership measures and include changes that can be implemented by CT Transit without significant effort:

1. ***Conduct a systematic and comprehensive review of all routes with the goal of establishing decentralized transit hubs outside the urban core that are linked by an efficient network of mainline crosstown routes to serve these hubs.*** The resulting network will better match the actual travel patterns of riders and potential riders.

2. ***Increase distribution networks of unlimited ride passes, using local retail businesses (e.g., banks, convenience stores, supermarkets, newsstands, etc.), institutions, non-profit agencies, and automatic fare vending machines, thereby increasing customer access.*** This will increase ridership by encouraging greater discretionary trips that are more likely to occur during off-peak hours.
3. ***Prioritize maintenance of bus stop signage by transferring responsibility for upkeep from local municipalities to CT Transit. Develop a protocol to report missing or damaged signs so they can be replaced or repaired promptly.*** The result will be greater customer visibility at portals to the system and improved user-friendliness for riders.
4. ***Institute a grassroots and low-cost marketing campaign by offering internship positions with local universities that have programs in public relations, public affairs, business or marketing.***
5. ***Print a comprehensive bus schedule book instead of printing individual bus tables for each route.*** This document will function as a marketing/promotional and educational tool.
6. ***Expand the current U-Pass program by pursuing U-Pass agreements at four additional universities and colleges: St. Joseph College, University of Connecticut (UCONN) Law School, the West Hartford Branch of UCONN, and the University of Hartford.***
7. ***Assist in the development of State legislation that authorizes a transit benefit program for State employees as part of their existing fringe benefits, or in the development of an executive order for the Governor to mandate such a program.*** A transit benefit program would encourage State employees to use public transportation for their commute to and from work.

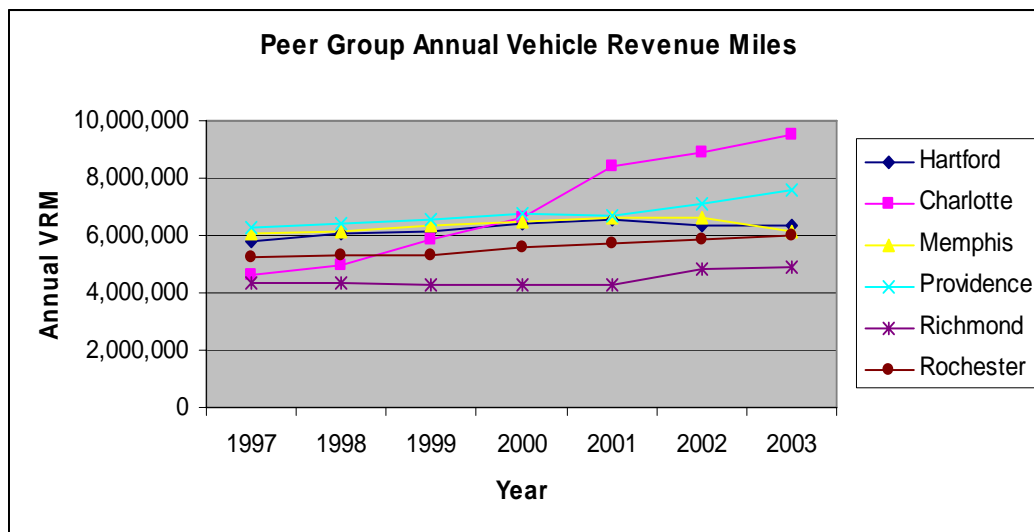
The report that follows provides the team's observations and a complete discussion of all recommendations.

CT Transit – Peer Group Analysis

According to 2000 U.S. Census data, the Ridership Team found that the Hartford, CT area has an average per capita income of \$26,047 and a 5.3% unemployment rate. The median age of Hartford's population was 29.7 years with 9.5% of the total population aged 65 years and older. Of the 50,478 persons in the Hartford area labor force, 82.2% of workers reported that they drive alone to and from work daily, while 11.2% of households indicated that they did not own a vehicle.

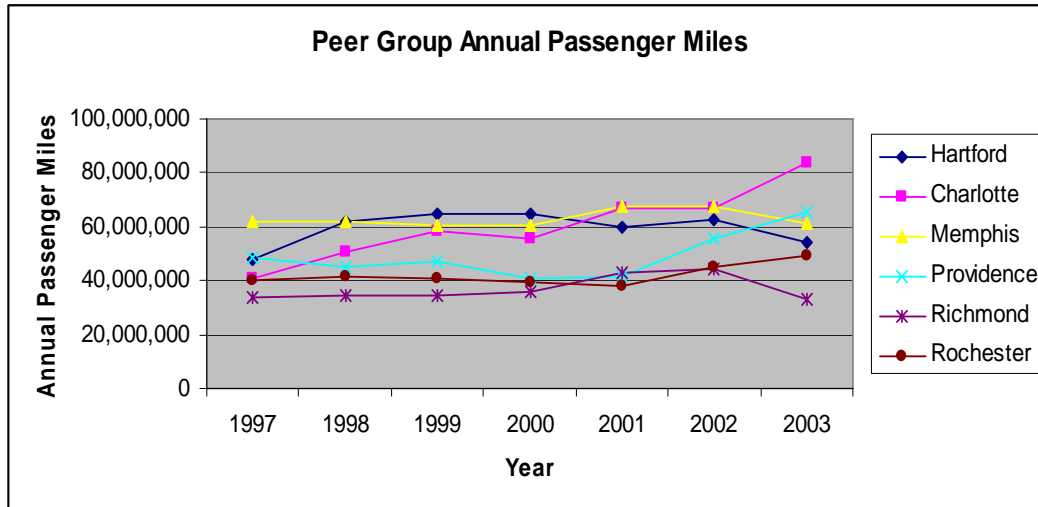
The Ridership Team members also analyzed system characteristics, financial, and performance data in FTA's National Transit Database (NTD) for the Hartford system, and five "peer" transit systems. The data were used to compare and contrast various indicators among the six transit systems.

Similar transit markets to CT Transit include -- the Memphis Area Transit Authority in Memphis, TN, the Greater Richmond Transit Company in Richmond, VA, the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority in Providence, RI, the Regional Transit Service in Rochester, NY, and the Charlotte Department of Transportation in Charlotte, NC. A brief analysis of these markets using the NTD reports from 1997-2003 provide the following key observations on trends (displayed in the graphs below):

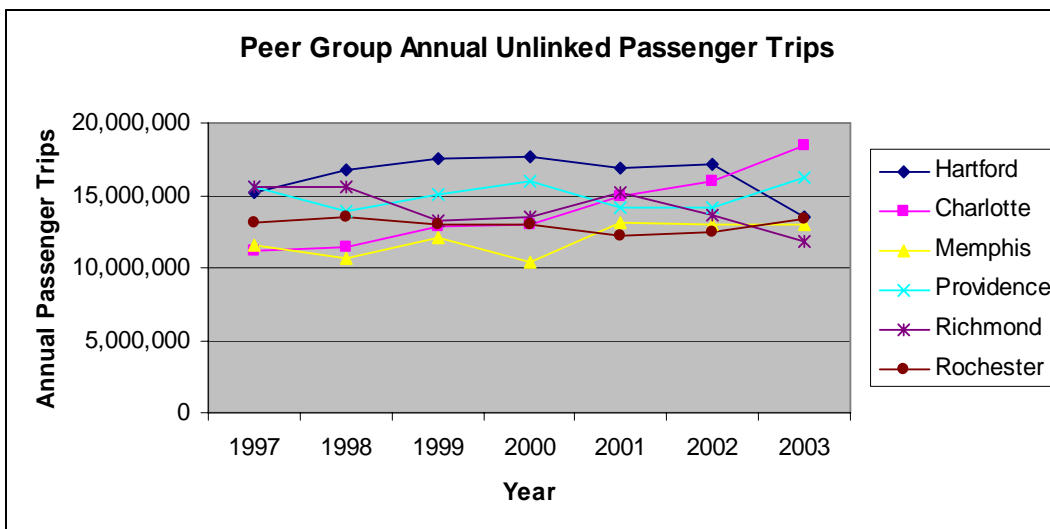


All of the peer comparison markets' annual revenue miles have remained constant. CT Transit has a service area that is roughly double that of the peer group comparison markets, but has annual revenue miles in the same range as these other smaller markets.

Opportunities for Ridership Enhancement – CT Transit – Hartford Division

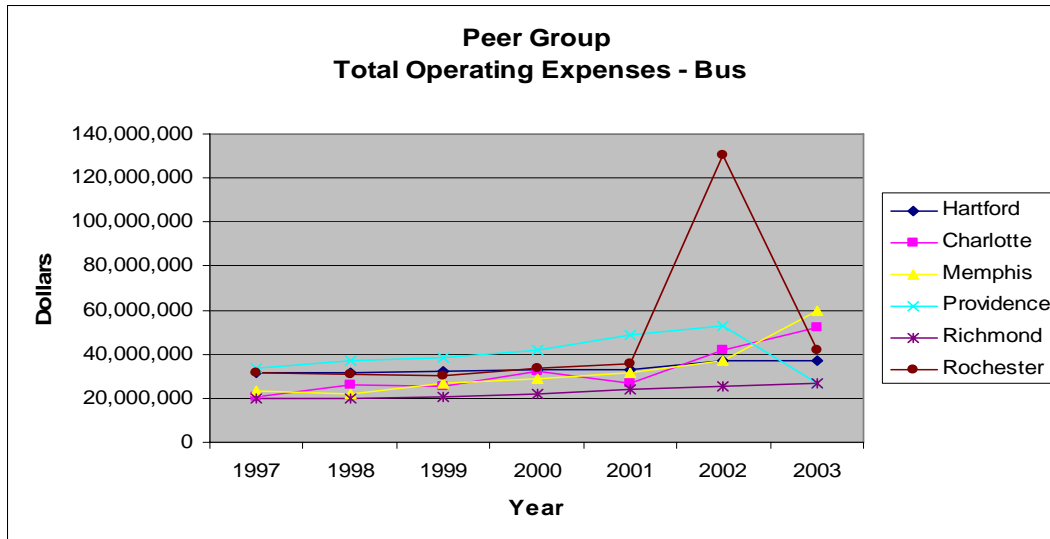


CT Transit covers fewer passenger miles annually than its peer transit systems.

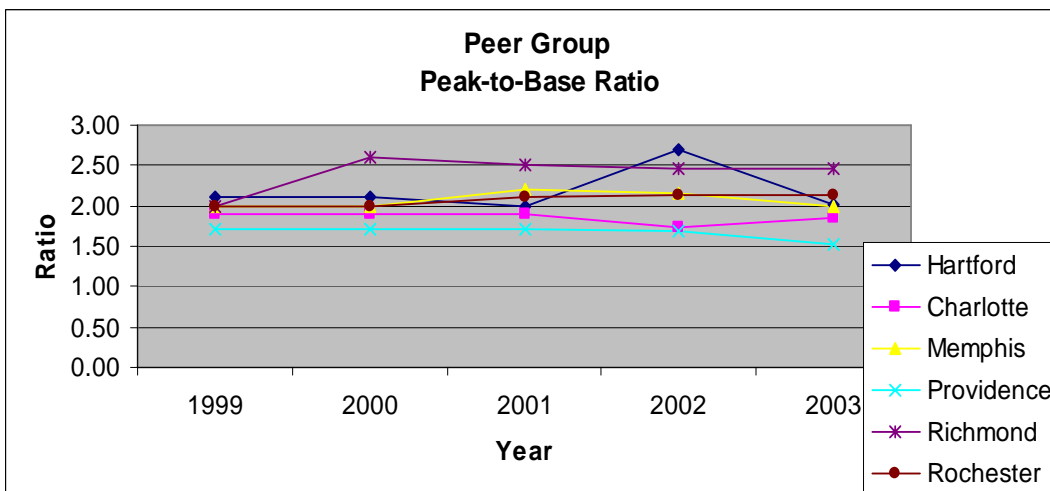


CT Transit has the largest service area population and service area size among the six systems, while it provides relatively the same number of passenger trips as do both Richmond, VA and Memphis, TN. Of the six systems analyzed, CT Transit exhibited the fewest vehicle miles per capita and passenger trips per capita, while being second only to Rochester in the number of passenger trips achieved per revenue mile. CT Transit thus appears to serve a broad, lower density area than the peer systems.

Opportunities for Ridership Enhancement – CT Transit – Hartford Division



In comparison to the peer markets, CT Transit's operating expenses have remained constant. CT Transit exhibited total operating expenses on par with Rochester, NY – a transit system also providing fixed route bus service and no demand-response paratransit – and slightly less than the smaller Providence system. While all three systems are comparable in the service they provide (bus only), CT Transit is successful in containing its operating budget.



CT Transit's peak to base ratio (2.0) falls well within the range of the peer markets, whose ratios range from 1.69 to 2.47. CT Transit is operating a similar number of vehicles during peak hours (morning and evening) and during its base operations (non-peak) when compared to its peer group markets.

Observations and Recommendations

Service Coverage/Routes

Riding the Bus

The Ridership Team took several trips on the CT Transit bus system during peak morning and off-peak morning hours to get a first hand view on how well the system was operating. The team found that all the buses were clean and well maintained, the drivers were very friendly and informative, and the buses ran on schedule.

However, new riders to the bus system would find accessing the bus routes confusing. The lack of uniform bus signage makes it very difficult to find any particular bus stop. In some places, there were no bus stop signs at all, requiring a rider to be familiar with the system to know where to stand in order to get on the bus. The route designation convention is not user-friendly since all local routes are identified by a letter and a number. The number, however, can refer either to a unique branch off of the trunk route or a separate route through-routed with a different numbered route of the same letter at the downtown hub. For example, the K1 and K2 are both branches off of the North Main Street route located north of downtown, while the K3 and K5 are branches off of the Park Street service south and west of downtown. These are through-routed with the North Main Street service. To add to the confusion, the K4 is a short-turn version of the K5. Bus riders interviewed by Team members indicated that they were often unaware of the numerical designation of their route segment.

Routes: Design, Coverage Gaps and Structure

CT Transit staff is very knowledgeable about the existing route structure, service area productions and attractions, and shifts in land use patterns, given the current changes in Hartford's business and employment environment. The basic structure of the route network has not significantly changed to reflect travel patterns that have shifted, as a result of economic and land use changes. The transit route system has been modified on an incremental basis to respond to immediate needs for adjustments to schedules, expansion of retail and employment opportunities on the periphery of the service area, and other community requests. The route structure that is shown on the overall system map appears to be complicated and circuitous. As a result, important gaps in service coverage are not apparent, although service design and structure tend to suffer as a result of the approach used for addressing service enhancement needs.

RECOMMENDATION:

CT Transit, in coordination with the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CONNDOT), should conduct a systematic and comprehensive review of the routes.

The system review should be conducted with the specific goal to increase per capita ridership. This could be accomplished by the development of scenarios, such as maximum ridership using existing resources, maximum productivity under a constrained system or optimum ridership per capita. The scenarios could also factor in other policy goals such as service coverage, or determine what service policy goals (frequency, service span, coverage) should be. Strategies that should be explored as part of the study include, but not be limited to: decentralized transit hubs at significant transit activity centers in the peripheral growth areas within the network; designing an efficient network of mainline cross-town routes to serve these hubs, which also provide connections to the downtown area; and, overlaying feeder, express, and commuter routes, where feasible, to enhance service connectivity at transit hubs.

Coordination and Schedules

The CT Transit staff use a comprehensive team approach in making service modifications and enhancements. The Planning and Scheduling division coordinates a committee of staff from within CT Transit, including the General Manager, Transit Services staff, and CONNDOT staff to review service issues and propose enhancement solutions. CT Transit also interacts with the community on an as-needed basis to better understand community service improvement needs. The resulting service changes are incorporated into the bus operator bid process. There is no short-range transit planning process to develop comprehensive or strategic service modifications.

CT Transit staff has implemented an automated scheduling and run-cutting system, Trapeze, to improve the service scheduling and bid process. At this point of inception, staff is confident that the scheduling software will enhance the efficiency of the scheduling process, provide a planning tool that can be used to perform analyses of various service options more quickly, and provide better information on service option costs.

RECOMMENDATION:

CT Transit should develop an internal, multi-year service development process to incorporate a comprehensive approach to its service planning activities and implement the system review recommendations.

Using the existing process, the Planning and Scheduling division would share proposals and ideas for service restructuring and route simplifications with other relevant staff. The service planning committee would be expanded to include other CT Transit divisions impacted by significant service restructuring plans (e.g., maintenance, marketing, finance, customer service, organized labor). Processes should include clear definitions of service goals, including policy levels of service, quality and customer satisfaction. After reviewing all proposals and getting input from the planning committee, the General Manager would approve the overall service design and multi-year implementation priorities. The plan should include service level estimates that could be used as a basis

for financial planning and budgeting purposes. The plan should be modified regularly (every 2 – 3 years) to reflect implementation progress and environmental realities.

Service

CT Transit demonstrates its customer focus and community support through the provision of a quality transit service. Its staff makes every effort to conduct outreach and works to address the transportation concerns of its patrons. Institutional issues should not impede the transit system's ability to engage its community on any issues that would facilitate the improvement of its services.

RECOMMENDATION:

CT Transit should develop a more comprehensive service improvement plan that would establish a stronger basis on which staff could interact with its customers and community.

Once developed, the plan would be an active document that is integrated into all levels of communications on matters related to transit service. CT Transit should be more involved in the review of land use decisions and urban development plans, so that transit can be efficiently incorporated into urban revitalization plans. Service information and printed materials can be designed to reflect a clear vision for transit service in the Hartford area. With CT Transit's increased involvement in planning, service financial decisions could be analyzed more effectively, marketing concepts could be planned and developed with a more distinctive vision, and policy implications and trade-offs could be examined before service changes are made. As an added benefit, ridership impacts and customer feedback could be monitored and attributed to specific service modifications.

Fare Structure

While it is often noted that the bus stop is the physical portal to a transit system, it is often overlooked that the distribution, sale, and collection of fare media serves as the *social* portal. It is at the point of sale and collection of fare media where customers are likely to have their first interaction with transit agency staff. The resulting positive, convenient, and customer-friendly experiences (with respect to fares) will have lasting ridership implications, both in promoting the system to new riders and in providing a welcoming environment to existing and potential riders. Additionally, appropriately targeted fare media may help change riders' behavior with respect to when and how often they ride. This can encourage greater ridership during off-peak hours when excess capacity exists and where marginal costs are lower.

Legislative Control of Fare Schedule

CT Transit is different from many other transit systems in that its fares are set by the Connecticut State legislature, giving CT Transit little control over its schedule of fares.

Not only does the legislature determine the base fare, currently \$1.25 for local service, but also sets rates for 10-ride tickets, 1, 3, 5, 7 and 31-day unlimited ride passes, zoned commuter express fares, base youth fares, senior/disabled fares, and associated multi-ride and unlimited use fares. The fare schedule is set for the entire CT Transit system (eight separate systems), so there is little opportunity to target fare options to local usage or need within a particular division. Similarly, fares that are of limited use for the Hartford Division are included in the overall system's fare schedule to target the needs of other CT Transit divisions. For example, a 5-day pass was introduced in 2004 system-wide to accommodate the smaller divisions of CT Transit that do not operate on Sundays.

As a result of the legislature's control over the details of the fare structure, CT Transit management has been discouraged from proposing changes to the fare structure or introducing fare promotions or incentives. Even with legislative approval, it takes at least nine months to change fares. The observations and recommendations that follow in this report are sensitive to this unique arrangement and suggest ways to obtain maximum local flexibility out of the legislatively prescribed fare structure.

Recent History of Fare Increases

CT Transit fares have increased twice since January 2004, with base fares rising from \$1.00 to \$1.10 in 2004 and again to \$1.25 in January 2005. An initial plan by the Connecticut Governor to increase fares by twenty-five cents to \$1.50 this fall was rejected by the legislature which statutorily prohibited another fare increase during the current fiscal year. Although the timing and amount of fare increases are outside CT Transit's control, the incentive to measure what effect these increases have on ridership is dampened. CT Transit's management noted that while ridership has decreased over the period of time in which the fare increase took place, the higher fares also occurred concurrently with service reductions and a depressed economic climate in Hartford.

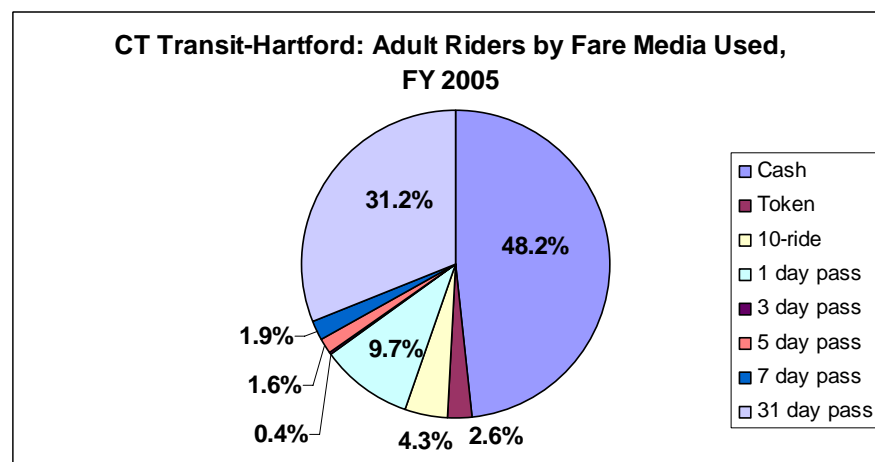
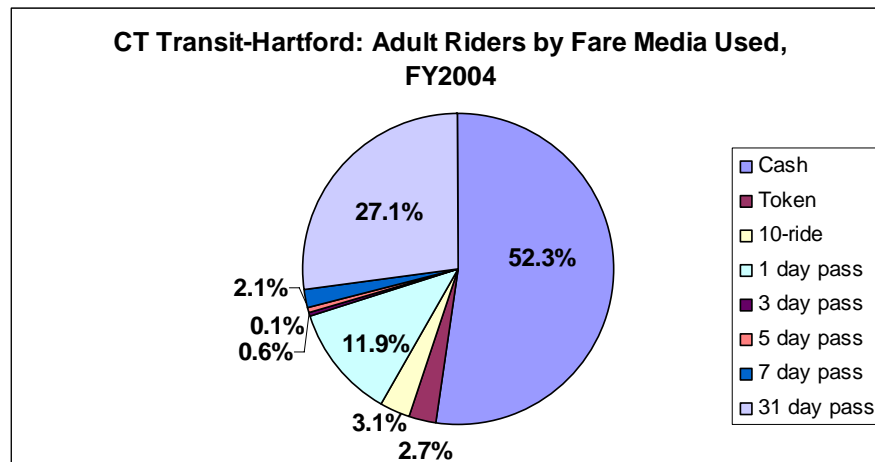
RECOMMENDATION:

CT Transit planning staff should more rigorously measure and project the fare elasticity's of its riders, including an examination of how different market segments respond to fare changes.

CT Transit will likely have to administer an increase in fares mandated by the legislature in the near future. Transit agencies often project system-wide impacts a given fare increase will have. However, they rarely conduct an analysis that would show that while peak commuter ridership may not be adversely affected by a fare increase, off-peak discretionary ridership will be. This causes a reduction in the very riders that are most cost-effective for the transit agency to carry. CT Transit will be best prepared to stem this kind of decline through targeted promotions, incentives and fare policies.

Schedule and Utilization of Fare Options

The legislatively prescribed fare structure is unusual in its diversity of options, offering customers one of the widest menus of fare options available anywhere in the country. However, only a few fare options are heavily used. In FY 2005, 48.2% of all adult local bus riders paid the base fare (\$1.25) in cash (this excludes student, senior/disabled, or commuter express riders). An additional 2.6% used pre-paid tokens equal to the base fare -- so a majority (over 50%) of riders pay the base fare rate. In addition 4.3% of adult trips use the discounted multi-ride 10-ride ticket. For unlimited use passes, only the rolling 31-day pass enjoys high use, accounting for 31.2% of all adult trips. The one-day pass is used on 9.7% of all adult trips, while the 3, 5 and 7-day passes are only used on 0.4%, 1.6%, and 1.9% of all adult trips, respectively. There are no annual unlimited ride passes available. Base fare use shows a downward trend, as does that of 1 and 7-day passes, while use of 3, 5 and 31-day passes shows an upward trend in usage. The charts below provide a comprehensive view of fare media sold.



CT Transit-Hartford: Adult Riders by Fare Media Used FY 2004 & FY 2005

	2004	% Adult	2005	% Adult	Change 2004-05
Cash	3,937,753	52.3%	3,162,287	48.2%	-4.1
Token	201,138	2.7%	172,824	2.6%	-0.1
10-ride	233,911	3.1%	285,254	4.3%	+1.2
1 day pass	898,228	11.9%	639,467	9.7%	-2.2
3 day pass	10,251	0.1%	23,123	0.4%	+0.3
5 day pass	42,981	0.6%	108,046	1.6%	+1.0
7 day pass	161,027	2.1%	123,625	1.9%	-0.2
31 day pass	2,038,036	27.1%	2,046,015	31.2%	+4.1
Total-Adult	7,523,325	100.0%	6,560,641	100.0%	N/A

Source: CT Transit, *Ridership and Financial Statistics*, May 2005

The minimal use of 3, 5, and 7-day passes and 10-ride tickets indicates a potentially untapped market. It is unknown whether the nominal use of these fare options is a function of inappropriate pricing, or limited availability and outreach. The discount offered by 10-ride tickets is relatively shallow and gives riders a per trip cost of \$1.13 -- a savings of only \$0.12 per ride compared to the base fare. The break-even point for unlimited ride passes is relatively high, at 2.6 rides, 6.0 rides, 9.0 rides, 12.0 rides, and 36.0 rides for the 1, 3, 5, 7, and 31-day passes, respectively.

RECOMMENDATION:

Simplify Fare Options: CT Transit should consider replacing the 10-ride ticket, as well as the 5 and 7-day passes with a new “weekly” pass that would be valid for 5 consecutive week days and include free use on the first weekend after first used.

The diversity of fare options available has the potential to overwhelm customers, forcing them to strategize as to what option would be most cost-effective for their use. Unfortunately, too much thought can result in inaction. While the variety of options serves a purpose if each targets specific markets, uses and niches, its utility is reduced if this is not the case. The new “weekly” pass would be priced the same as the current 5-day pass and the 10-ride ticket (\$11.25). For current users of the 7 day pass the result would be a price break, while current users of the 5 day pass (particularly in the systems with limited or no weekend service) would gain greater flexibility, as passes could now be purchased any day of the week. The “free weekends” could be used as a promotional tool (as is done by some providers of cell phone service), while there would be limited lost revenue as most additional rides would be during the weekends, when sufficient capacity exists. While elimination of the 10-ride ticket may be more difficult to accomplish, it has only limited use and bus operators’ report it is the most subject to

abuse. If it is not possible to eliminate the 10-ride tickets, the 5 and 7-day passes could still be combined into the proposed “weekly” pass. The proposed simplification would remain consistent with the legislatively prescribed fare schedule because the new “weekly” pass would officially be the 5-day pass with the promotional incentive of free weekends included.

RECOMMENDATION:

CT Transit should consider implementing a fare free zone within the boundary of the Hartford Downtown Circulator route.

CT Transit does not currently have any fare-free zones. However, with the planned introduction of the Hartford Downtown Circulator, there has been discussion of having the Circulator run fare free. If, however, the fare-free policy is made zone-specific rather than route specific, that would help pull riders into the entire system, rather than just a single premium service perceived as entirely separate from the rest of the system.

Distribution and Outreach

All fare media are available at the downtown transit center kiosk located behind the Old State House in Hartford. All fare media are available on-line and by mail, although this option is more attractive for the longer-term 31-day passes over shorter-term options that typically demand the greater immediacy of a face-to-face or machine-based transaction. Only the 1-day pass is available for purchase on the bus itself, perhaps partially explaining its attractiveness over the 3, 5 or 7-day passes. There is no use of other distribution outlets or third party sales outlets for sale of fare media. There are no automatic fare dispensing machines located anywhere in the region. While CT Transit does have arrangements with some large employers in the area to sell passes to their employees (generally at a discounted rate), these distribution sites are available only to employees of these businesses and remain unavailable to the general public.

Information regarding different fare options is found posted inside the bus, and a poster-sized color display showing a graphic representation of each of the multiple fare options available is on display at the downtown information center kiosk. The system maps, dated August 1, 2004, are not current since the fare information does not reflect the January 2005 increase.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Wider Distribution of Unlimited Ride Passes:

- a. CT Transit should partner with local retail businesses, (banks, convenience stores, supermarkets, newsstands, etc.), institutions, and non-profit agencies to provide additional opportunities for customers to purchase fare media.***
- b. CT Transit should consider placing automatic fare vending machines at strategic locations throughout the system.***

Working within the legislatively prescribed fare schedule, CT Transit should strive to actively promote its underutilized unlimited use passes. In addition to giving CT Transit up-front revenue, unlimited ride passes offer a great opportunity to increase ridership by encouraging greater discretionary trips, more likely to occur during the off-peak, when marginal costs are low and where excess capacity exists. As noted above, other than on-line and by mail, neither of which offers the same immediacy of a face-to-face transaction, fare media are only available at the downtown transit center. Initially, CT Transit should start with only a few of the available options, such as the 3, 7 and 31-day passes, in order to avoid complexity and to not overburden outlet centers.

RECOMMENDATION:

CT Transit should consider offering free fare media as an incentive for potential new riders to try transit for the first time.

CT Transit does not currently use fare promotions or offer free fare coupons to prospective riders. Fares can serve as a marketing tool, and initial losses could yield long term ridership and revenue benefits. In particular, CT Transit might work with developers of downtown condos to offer free transit coupons to downtown residents who represent a strong potential transit market. These residents are likely to use the system for reverse commute and discretionary trips that use excess capacity. By recording the use of free fare coupons, CT Transit can also track the effectiveness of various marketing strategies.

Fare Collection and Transfers

Fare boxes use automatic fare technology, although the equipment is now approximately 10 years old. Drivers report that fare boxes will sometimes fail to read fare media, particularly during times of precipitation when the tickets can be compromised by moisture. Drivers also suggest that some riders will deliberately deface the magnetic strip, particularly on the 10-ride tickets, in order to gain extra rides. When fareboxes fail to read, drivers must manually punch fare media, which adds to dwell times at stations, and increases the likelihood that full ridership will not be accurately counted.

Fareboxes register dollar bills only. While official transit policy states that \$5, \$10 and \$20 bills are not accepted, there is no reason why larger bills could not be used, provided the driver is able to visually identify the bill and that no change is required. The reality is that some drivers do in fact accept larger bills while others do not, thus creating a systemic inconsistency that depends on the discretion of the driver. Currently 1-day passes are the only passes available for purchase onboard the vehicle. Riders must alert the driver that they wish to purchase a 1-day pass prior to depositing money into the fare box.

CT Transit has a relatively liberal transfer policy that allows free transfers to all routes except for stopovers or the return trip on the same route that the transfer was offered within a pre-set time period (45 or 90 minutes) when requested at the time of initial fare

payment. Transfers are also accepted and offered for adjacent transit districts, although bus drivers note that they must issue an additional transfer prior to passenger alighting, due to long trip time of inter-district trips. 20.2% of all fares are paid using transfers.

CT Transit management has identified as a priority a move toward universal fare structures and fare collection equipment for all transit districts across the state in order to make inter-district transfers seamless.

RECOMMENDATION:

CT Transit should explore offering 3 and 5-day (new weekly) passes for sale onboard buses in order to give riders greater access to these fare options.

This will require a change in policy with respect to acceptance of bills larger than one dollar.

RECOMMENDATION:

CT Transit should consider implementing a new farebox system to help alleviate problems related to the failure to read fare media, which leads to increased dwell times when drivers are required to manually punch tickets.

New fareboxes should eliminate the need to alert the driver before initiating payment for a one day pass. If the recommendation is followed to make more fare media available onboard buses, the new equipment will help facilitate this practice. This recommendation depends on the ability of CT Transit or CONNDOT to absorb this capital expense, or to obtain necessary Federal funds.

RECOMMENDATION:

CT Transit should not make the implementation of universal statewide fare structure and collection equipment a priority.

While a universal system may be advantageous in fostering seamless connections between systems, as indicated above, inter-district ridership is relatively small. The cost, however, would be a further weakening of CT Transit-Hartford's ability to target the local population, potentially creating a "lowest common denominator" structure that fails to respond to the community in which it operates.

RECOMMENDATION:

CT Transit employees should be given passes that can be read by fareboxes to accurately include them in total ridership numbers.

This is the one recommendation for which implementation would immediately result in an increase in trips recorded, albeit not in numbers of individuals carried. Currently,

there is a core ridership group composed of CT Transit operators and staff traveling in revenue service via the W route between the CT Transit office and maintenance facility and the downtown transit center. However, since CT Transit employees ride free using their employee IDs as a flash pass, their rides go unrecorded. If employees were granted passes that could be read by the fareboxes, this particular ridership base would be accurately counted.

Operations/Maintenance

Transportation

The Ridership Team was impressed with the overall quality of the transportation department. Road Supervisors, a position critical for effective on-street operations, seem to be well qualified and perform their jobs diligently. However, it appears that at times they are stretched beyond their means. Also, the number of spare buses has been reduced due to budget constraints. This has negatively impacted adherence to schedules.

RECOMMENDATION:

CT Transit should perform an analysis to determine the optimum number of road supervisors and spare buses.

It was neither possible nor appropriate for the Team to determine the optimal number of road supervisors or spare buses. Transportation management within CT Transit believes the number of road supervisors should be increased from 18 to 22 and spare buses from 2 to 4. If an increase is warranted, this should be made a budget priority in future years to improve and sustain system reliability.

Recruitment and Training

There is a significant customer focus in the recruitment and training of drivers. In addition to the five-week initial training, three-day customer relations training occurs during the first year and a one-day follow-up during the second year of employment. There does not appear to be any regular follow-up training for drivers after the second year for road supervisors once they have completed their probationary period.

RECOMMENDATION:

CT Transit should develop a mandatory on-going training program for all drivers and road supervisors.

The program could specify a number of hours per year. The actual program developed annually should include customer relations, safety, security, and other factors that help employees perform better.

Bus Stops

There is currently a program to install new uniform bus stop signs throughout the system which is expected to take three years to complete. Once signs are installed, they will be the responsibility of the municipalities to maintain. CT Transit has one employee responsible for installing the signs, but no staff to perform maintenance. This could perpetuate the current problem of missing signs since municipalities do not have the same interest in maintaining bus stops as they do their other signs.

CT Transit has a policy of not locating bus stops closer than 700 feet apart, which is reasonable for an urban system. On some major boulevards CT Transit is working with the municipality on a bus stop rationalization program in conjunction with their streetscape improvements.

RECOMMENDATION:

CT Transit should be responsible for maintaining all bus stop signs, unless prohibited by municipalities due to labor contract provisions, such as city employee unions not permitting CT Transit to perform the work.

A protocol should be in place to report missing or damaged signs so that they may be replaced or repaired within one week. A CT Transit employee should be charged with this duty. Since this is not likely to amount to more than one day per week, the person installing new signs could devote 20% of his/her time to sign maintenance and 80% of his/her time to new sign installation over the next three to four years. Upon completion of the initial installations, this position could be given other responsibilities in addition to sign maintenance. Before installing new signs, bus stops that are closer than 700 feet should be removed or consolidated to create a 700 to 1,000 foot separation. They could reduce in vehicle travel time without significantly increasing out-of-vehicle travel time, two factors that influence transit ridership. CT Transit should make a more concerted effort to convince municipalities to give CT Transit control of its own stops and signs.

RECOMMENDATION:

CT Transit should work with municipalities to develop an advertising bench and shelter program.

This can be implemented throughout the service area to increase the number of amenities without requiring public funds to assure proper maintenance.

RECOMMENDATION:

CT Transit should monitor all new residential and commercial developments to ensure that bus stops are provided as well as pedestrian access from the surrounding service area.

When reviewing a development, CT Transit should look for opportunities to improve pedestrian access from surrounding areas that are not part of the development.

Marketing

The marketing and customer information functions of CT Transit – Hartford could benefit from a strategic plan. While there are many positive actions currently being taken, the overall approach is more general rather than having a specific, integrated plan. Notably missing is a media relations strategy. Obtaining free media coverage can be an effective way to draw new customers and to build public support. This could conserve funds that are now being spent on media advertising.

RECOMMENDATION:

CT Transit should offer internship positions with local universities that have programs in public relations, public affairs, business or marketing.

This partnership could provide valuable experience for the students and a great resource for CT Transit, at a very low cost. The interns could perform tasks such as attending city council and zoning meetings to make sure public transit is being considered in all planning, participating in on campus marketing for students, and attending all community events for CT Transit promotional purposes.

There are opportunities to attract new riders to the system through outreach programs that will not involve significant costs. The existing plan for CT Transit to work with non-traditional immigrants by developing a how-to-ride curriculum with the Greater Hartford Literary council is very promising, and should be replicated throughout the country. There may be other opportunities to participate with English as a Second Language (ESL) programs at various other locations.

The Kennedy Center Travel Training Program presents another excellent opportunity to aid in mainstreaming individuals with disabilities onto fixed route service. Proper training and oversight of drivers in assisting persons with disabilities is important and necessary to retaining and maintaining this new customer group.

The Tri-state internet trip planning project (www.trips123.com) on the web will be a valuable tool for CT Transit customers when it is fully implemented. It can also be used by telephone information personnel in planning more consistent and efficient trips. Since this is funded by a consortium of various entities, it will save CT Transit the cost of providing this service.

RECOMMENDATION:

CT Transit should update its website.

The website should be more user-friendly, welcoming, and attractive to new and existing riders. The website also needs to have current information, with all route detours or changes listed and explained. The links used for customers to navigate the site should be weighted in order of use and importance to the customer. All information is now simply posted, and it all has the same value. This makes the site very difficult to navigate, examine, and understand. Routes and schedules should be foremost on the site, if they are, in fact, the most often accessed. The current website requires too much scrolling to find information important to a rider. CT Transit should have all their schedules available in a text based format, which can be easily pulled from the scheduling software, rather than only in a PDF format. The new CT Transit design logo should also be incorporated throughout the website for consistency in all system media.

RECOMMENDATION:

CT Transit should use the new bus logo design and colors on all of its printed materials.

Currently, the largest expenditure in the marketing area is \$265,000 spent on timetables and system maps. While these materials are clean, easy to read, and easy to understand, their overall designs are somewhat dated. There is little branding consistency between the pieces. With the new look and paint scheme on the buses (and hopefully bus stop signage), this is a timely opportunity to tie the brand image together on all CT Transit materials with a more contemporary theme.

RECOMMENDATION:

CT Transit should print a schedule book instead of printing individual bus tables.

Since there are so many timetables, printing a schedule book may present a good alternative to printing the tables separately. By doing so, CT Transit would need to commit to updating and reprinting the schedule book as needed. The advantage is the ability to present the entire system in a single document. This will allow CT Transit to offer timetables at public institutions (such as colleges, shopping centers, government buildings, and medical centers) without consuming a significant amount of space for every single individual timetable or running the risk of popular timetables being out of stock. It will also be easier to keep buses constantly stocked with the correct timetable since there would be only one document covering all routes. Customers could easily obtain information when connecting between routes or taking trips that are different from their normal route. This document could easily be used in recommended marketing strategies and promotions, as well as in ESL program efforts.

RECOMMENDATION:

CT Transit should indicate the type of service a certain bus provides in a box with the route numbers on the system map.

The system map is somewhat confusing since it contains so many branches. There is no clear indication that some branches only provide minimal service.

CT Transit is in a unique situation as an operating arm of CONNDOT. The role of “only accepting and implementing policy” is a restrictive one, but need not be completely limiting. The agency could take a more proactive role with CONNDOT and the community in identifying areas of opportunity and in advancing action plans that will lead to real improvements for customers and increases in ridership.

RECOMMENDATION:

CT Transit should conduct a “Future Search.”

This is an interactive planning process where all stakeholders are brought together to identify areas of common interest and work with the MPO and other jurisdictions to develop an umbrella plan for transportation improvements.

Partnerships

Opportunities for increasing ridership exist in the use of various types of partnerships. They include university or school provided passes, employer provided passes or vouchers, vanpooling and carpooling programs, public transportation coordination with social service agencies, and transit oriented development in the vicinity of transit stations, hubs, or transfer centers.

University Passes

In 1999, CT Transit initiated U-Pass programs with Trinity College and Capital Community College, both located in Hartford. The program allows a pass holder unlimited rides on CT Transit buses at any time during the semester. CT Transit bills the college on a monthly basis for the actual number of rides taken by their students. The rate charged to the colleges is equal to 65% of the base adult fare, except that Capital has a cap on its payment.

In the spring 2005 semester, CT Transit charged 71 cents per ride, compared with the full daily fare of \$1.25. Since Capital has much greater usage of the program than Trinity, CT Transit negotiated a cap for the semester equal to \$22 times the total number of registered students at the college. Although the ridership and revenue from both colleges has fluctuated since 1999, the general trend for both has been an increase in usage.

CT Transit’s service area includes numerous other institutions of higher learning, including St. Joseph College, the University of Connecticut (U CONN), the Hartford College for Women, and the University of Hartford. Costs of the U-Pass program per student as compared with tuition costs are insignificant. For example, annual

undergraduate tuition alone at St Joseph is almost \$20,000; for residents at U CONN, tuition is almost \$7,000.

RECOMMENDATION:

CT Transit should pursue U-Pass type agreements at four additional universities.

The following institutions of higher learning are good targets for this approach: *St Joseph College* on Asylum Avenue in West Hartford (A-1 bus route); *University of Connecticut (UCONN) Law School* on Elizabeth Street in Hartford (A-2 bus route); the West Hartford branch of *UCONN* on Asylum Avenue (A-1 bus route); and, the *University of Hartford* on Albany Avenue in West Hartford (U bus route).

Employer Passes and Vouchers

CT Transit has arrangements with more than 100 large employers to sell bus passes. These employers, in turn, provide them to employees primarily on a pre-tax basis that are paid for by the employee who elects to exchange a portion of their taxable salary for a tax-free bus pass. CT Transit's program, called "Deduct-A-Ride" is primarily oriented towards the pre-tax approach, rather than the employer-paid approach. Numerous studies have found that employer-subsidized passes have a significant impact on encouraging both new bus riders and maintaining existing riders in the system. This is especially true when compared with employee-funded passes on a pre-tax basis, which have minimal positive impact on transit ridership.

RECOMMENDATION:

CT Transit should revise its program and website to place more emphasis on employers purchasing the passes and providing them at no cost to their employees, rather than promoting the "pretax" approach.

This is a proven method of increasing transit ridership while the existing program that encourages the pre-tax approach attracts virtually no new riders to the system. A change in name from "Deduct-A-Ride" would also help inform corporate customers of the change in the emphasis of the program.

RECOMMENDATION:

Depending on the benefit and compensation laws for State employees, CT Transit should either assist in the development of legislation that authorizes and requires that State workers receive free transit passes as part of their existing fringe benefit program, or assist in the drafting of an executive order for the Governor to mandate such a program.

Such passes would encourage State employees to use public transportation to commute from their residences to their State employment locations. The actual cost to the State

would not be significant since a relatively small percentage of the workforce would likely request such passes. Regular passes cost \$45 per month, while express bus passes would be higher (Zone 4 is \$122 for a 31-day pass, of which \$105 would be paid for by the State; Zone 3 is \$100 & Zone 2 is \$77). The total cost to the State would be less than a cost-of-living adjustment for State employees.

In 2000, President Clinton issued an executive order requiring all Federal agencies to offer such benefits to their employees. The Order was based on existing Federal legislation that authorized provisions of such benefits to Federal employees. Copies of the Federal executive order, program guidance, and Federal legislation, are found in Appendices A, B, and C, respectively.

Vanpooling and Carpooling

The State vanpool program is operated by CT Transit. Vanpools are owned and operated by the State under contract with the Rideshare Company. The company also sets up carpool matching programs and other transportation demand management programs.

Social Service Coordination

Coordination of dedicated social services transportation and public transportation can result in significant cost savings, improved service to customers, and an increased use of public transportation. Since CT Transit reports to a different State agency (Transportation) than the one responsible for such coordination (Human Services), we are not recommending an action in this report since it is outside CT Transit's purview. CONNDOT would be responsible for the initiation of any such coordination.

CT Transit provides good bus access to hospitals (e.g. St Francis - bus routes S, A, and F; Q-3 and P-1; Bloomfield Hospital - bus route S-1; Manchester Hospital on bus route YM-1; Connecticut Veterans Hospital on bus route T-1 (e.g., Connecticut Department of Social Services - bus route YM; Burgdorf Medical Center on bus route L; Hartford Department of Social Services - bus routes W-3, L, and K).

Transit Oriented Development (TOD)

CONNDOT has proposed a dedicated busway that would run bus rapid transit-levels of service between Union Station in Hartford and downtown New Britain. CT Transit would operate the 9.4 mile system with 11 stations that would include numerous feeder routes and express buses that would merge at different points along the alignment. Since 2000, the project has been in preliminary engineering and is in the Federal New Starts pipeline.

RECOMMENDATION:

CT Transit should explore opportunities for transit oriented development (TOD) along the busway since the system is designed to include discrete stations rather than simple bus stops.

This should result in increased ridership due to new employment at residential and commercial activity centers focused around transit stations. CT Transit's interest in Transit Oriented Development (TOD) is its positive impact on ridership, while communities, municipalities, developers, and land use planners support TOD for the economic gains that result.

Similarly, CT Transit should pursue TOD opportunities around satellite transit hubs established outside the urban core, which will function like stations.

Appendices

- A. Executive Order 13150, Federal Workforce Transportation
- B. Executive Order 13150, Frequently Asked Questions
- C. 5 USC 7905, Federal Employees Clean Air Incentives Act

Appendix A

Executive Order 13150 of April 21, 2000

Federal Workforce Transportation

By the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution and the laws of the United States of America, including the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (Public Law 105-178), section 1911 of the Energy Policy Act of 1992 (Public Law 102-486), section 531(a)(1) of the Deficit Reduction Act of 1984 (26 U.S.C. 132), and the Federal Employees Clean Air Incentives Act (Public Law 103-172), and in order to reduce Federal employees' contribution to traffic congestion and air pollution and to expand their commuting alternatives, it is hereby ordered as follows:

Section 1. Mass Transportation and Vanpool

Transportation Fringe Benefit Program.

(a) By no later than October 1, 2000, Federal agencies shall implement a transportation fringe benefit program that offers qualified Federal employees the option to exclude from taxable wages and compensation, consistent with section 132 of title 26, United States Code, employee commuting costs incurred through the use of mass transportation and vanpools, not to exceed the maximum level allowed by law (26 U.S.C. 132 (f)(2)). These agency programs shall comply with the requirements of Internal Revenue Service regulations for qualified transportation fringe benefits under section 1.132-9 of title 26, Code of Federal Regulations, and other guidance.

(b) Federal agencies are encouraged to use any nonmonetary incentive that the agencies may otherwise offer under any other provision of law or other authority to encourage mass transportation and vanpool use, as provided for in section 7905(b)(2)(C) of title 5, United States Code.

Sec. 2. Federal Agencies in the National Capital Region.

Federal agencies in the National Capital Region shall implement a "transit pass" transportation fringe benefit program for their qualified Federal employees by no later than October 1, 2000. Under this program, agencies shall provide their qualified Federal employees, in addition to current compensation, transit passes as defined in section 132(f)(5) of title 26, United States Code, in amounts approximately equal to employee commuting costs, not to exceed the maximum level allowed by law (26 U.S.C. 132(f)(2)). The National Capital Region is defined as the District of Columbia; Montgomery, Prince George's, and Frederick Counties in Maryland; Arlington, Fairfax, Loudon, and Prince William Counties in Virginia; and all cities now or hereafter existing in Maryland or Virginia within the geographic area bounded by the outer boundaries of the combined area of said counties.

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Sec. 3. Nationwide Pilot Program.

The Department of Transportation, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Department of Energy shall implement a `transit pass` transportation fringe benefit program, as described in section 2 of this order, for all of their qualified Federal employees as a 3 year pilot program by no later than October 1, 2000. Before determining whether the program should be extended to other Federal employees nationwide, it shall be analyzed by an entity determined by the agencies identified in section 4 of this order to ascertain, among other things, if it is effective in reducing single occupancy vehicle travel and local area traffic congestion.

Sec. 4. Guidance.

Federal agencies shall develop plans to implement this order in consultation with the Department of the Treasury, the Department of Transportation, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Office of Personnel Management, the General Services Administration, and the Office of Management and Budget. Federal agencies that currently have more generous programs or benefits in place may continue to offer those programs or benefits. Agencies shall absorb the costs of implementing this order within the sums received pursuant to the President's FY 2001 budget request to the Congress.

Sec. 5. Judicial Review.

This order is not intended to and does not create any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law by any party against the United States, its agencies or instrumentalities, its officers or employees, or any other person.

THE WHITE HOUSE,

April 21, 2000.

Appendix B
Executive Order 13150 - Federal Workforce Transportation -
Frequently Asked Questions

(Updated August 2005)

1. Which Federal employees will receive transit and vanpool benefits?

All Federal employees in the National Capital Region (NCR) must be offered a benefit equal to their commuting costs, not to exceed \$105, in the form of passes or vouchers such as Metrochek, purchased by the agency with appropriated funds. As part of a 3 year pilot program, all employees nationwide of the Departments of Transportation (DOT) and Energy (DOE) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will also be offered these same benefits, purchased with agency appropriated funds.

2. What will Federal employees receive if their agencies are located outside of the NCR?

Federal employees located outside the NCR may elect to reduce their pre-tax income by an amount equal to their transit or vanpool expenses up to a maximum of \$105 per month. The agency will accumulate these withholdings and purchase the vouchers, passes, or fare media on behalf of the employee, and then distribute this fare media directly to the participating employees.

3. Who are "qualified Federal employees?"

See 5 U.S.C. 7905 and 5 U.S.C. 2105 for a complete definition of Federal employees. In some cases, your agency's appropriations acts may further define employees for purposes of this program (e.g., National Institutes of Health, P.L. 105-277).

4. What are "nonmonetary incentives?"

These incentives may include, but are not limited to, flex-time, preferential parking for employees who commute in carpools or vanpools, or preference for use of agency provided dependent care facilities. The provision of these incentives is authorized by the Federal Employees Clean Air Incentives Act of 1993, 5 U.S.C. 7905.

5. What does "amounts approximately equal to employee commuting costs" mean?

Rounded to the nearest dollar. For example, if an employee's actual commuting expense is \$50.40 per month, then the agency would provide him/her transit fare media worth \$50; if the cost were \$50.70, then the agency would provide fare media worth \$51.

6. Does "transit pass" include vanpool benefits?

Yes.

7. What vanpools are eligible for these benefits?

Employer operated and employee operated van pools as well as private or public transit operated vanpools may qualify as qualified transportation fringes. For complete rules, see question #16c below.

Qualified vanpool operators in the NCR should contact the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) (see #16f) to participate in the Metrochek program. Operators outside the NCR should contact transit agencies in their service area (see #16g) to partner with their program. If vouchers or passes for vanpool use are not readily available, then Federal employees using qualified vanpool services must obtain receipts (see #16c) for presentation to their employing agency for reimbursement. Reimbursement may be made using either employee pretax funds or agency appropriated funds. The funds used to reimburse vanpool expenses must be the same as those used to purchase transit passes and vouchers.

8. What are "more generous programs or benefits in place?"

Outside of the NCR, agencies are required to implement this program using pre-tax employee funds. If an agency decides instead to provide transit/vanpool passes or vouchers worth at least \$47, using agency appropriated funds, then this would be considered a more generous program. A \$47 benefit given in addition to an employee's salary is worth more to the employee than a \$105 benefit using pre-tax employee funds. If an agency decides to provide an agency-funded benefit worth at least \$47 outside the NCR, then it would not be required to offer any pre-tax program to its employees. If the employee's actual monthly commuting costs are less than \$47, then the agency would provide a pass or voucher equal to the actual cost, rather than the \$47. Inside the NCR however, agencies would have to provide the full \$105 benefit as indicated above.

9. Where does the funding come from for this program?

Federal agencies must fund this program within the sums received as a result of fiscal year budgets approved by Congress. The particular type of funds to be used by the agency for this program should be determined by each agency's budget and accounting offices.

10. If my agency now offers less than \$105 in agency-paid benefits, must we increase it to the maximum tax-free limit?

Yes, if your agency is located in the NCR or is DOT, DOE, or EPA. Employees must receive a transit or vanpool pass equal to their actual commuting costs, not to exceed \$105 per month. Outside the NCR, if your agency is providing a benefit of at least \$47 in appropriated funds, then no further action would be needed, since this would be considered a more generous program than the pre-tax program, as indicated above.

11. Will the \$105 limit change over time?

Yes. Under a provision of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century,

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beginning January 1, 2002, the monthly tax-free transit and vanpool limit rose from \$65 to \$100 per month. Additionally, with changes to the Consumer Price Index (CPI), the monthly limit may increase by increments of \$5. The last change made under this provision was in 2005, when the monthly limit was raised from \$100 to \$105. Any such CPI-initiated changes will be announced by the Internal Revenue Service in the December prior to the effective year of the change.

12. Outside the NCR, under the pre-tax program, what are the tax consequences for the agency and the employee?

Any amount, up to the monthly tax-free limits, by which an employee elects to reduce compensation to fund either transit or vanpool benefits, is not subject to the Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA), the Federal Unemployment Tax Act (FUTA), and Federal income tax withholding. These amounts may also be exempt from City or State income taxes. For pre-tax program participants, since FICA would not be collected on the amount of compensation that is exchanged for the benefit, employees under the Federal Employee Retirement System will experience a minimal reduction in their Social Security benefits at retirement.

13. Inside the NCR, what are the tax consequences for the agency and the employee?

Transit and vanpool benefits not exceeding the statutory monthly limit (\$105 in 2005) are not wages for purposes of the FICA, the FUTA, and Federal income tax withholding.

14. Can my agency simply provide a transit or vanpool benefit in the employee's paycheck each month?

No. Regardless of the source of funds (agency appropriated dollars or employee pre-tax salary funds) or location of the agency (inside or outside the NCR), agencies must purchase transit or vanpool passes or vouchers (where readily available) and distribute them directly to the participating employees.

15. Can my agency provide parking benefits at transit facilities?

Yes. Although not required by the Executive Order, Federal agencies may elect to reimburse employees for their qualified parking expenses at or near transit stations, park-and-ride lots, or vanpool staging areas, using employee pre-tax salary funds, up to a maximum cost of \$200 (2005) per month. Appropriated funds may not be used for these purposes unless exceptional circumstances exist. Parking costs are treated separately from transit costs, even if they are incurred in conjunction with an employee's use of public transit or vanpools. Agencies may also provide such parking at the agency's office for vanpools and carpools. Agencies that make cash reimbursements for parking must establish a bona fide reimbursement arrangement (see #16c) to establish that their employees have, in fact, incurred such expenses. Agency provision of single occupancy vehicle parking is not consistent with the intent of the Executive Order, but may be permitted under other authority.

16. Where can we go for additional information?

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	Type of Information	Source	Telephone
a.	City and State income tax information	Transit & Vanpool Benefits Tax Exemption Information by State Jurisdiction	*****
b.	Contracting out the implementation and administration of the programs required by the Executive Order	Transportation Administrative Services Center, U. S. DOT Office of the Secretary of Transportation	202-366-1399
c.	Internal Revenue Service rules and regulations on qualified transportation fringe benefits	Internal Revenue Service - Qualified Transportation Fringes - 26 CFR 1.132-9	202-622-6040
d.	Federal Workforce Transportation	Executive Order 13150	202-366-1698
e.	Authority to allot employee salary for the agency to pay for the benefit with pretax dollars	U.S. Office of Personnel Management, Office of the General Counsel	202-606-1700
f.	Metrochek Program (NCR)	Metrochek	202-962-2768
g.	List of Transit Agencies with Transit and Vanpool Benefit Programs	Voucher & Pass Program Directory	202-366-1698
h.	Other information on the Executive Order	Federal Transit Administration -- Commuter Choice	202-366-1698

Appendix C

5 USC 7905

Federal Employees Clean Air Incentives Act

For the purpose of this section—

(1) the term “employee” means an employee as defined by section **2105**, a member of a uniformed service, and a student who provides voluntary services under section **3111**;

(2) the term “agency” means—

(A) an Executive agency;

(B) an entity of the legislative branch; and

(C) the judicial branch;

(3) the term “entity of the legislative branch” means the House of Representatives, the Senate, the Office of the Architect of the Capitol (including the Botanic Garden), the Capitol Police, the Congressional Budget Office, the Copyright Royalty Tribunal, the Government Printing Office, the Library of Congress, and the Office of Technology Assessment; and

(4) the term “transit pass” means a transit pass as defined by section 132(f)(5) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986.

(b)

(1) The head of each agency may establish a program to encourage employees of such agency to use means other than single-occupancy motor vehicles to commute to or from work.

(2) A program established under this section may involve such options as—

(A) transit passes (including cash reimbursements therefore, but only if a voucher or similar item which may be exchanged only for a transit pass is not readily available for direct distribution by the agency);

(B) furnishing space, facilities, or services to bicyclists; and

(C) any non-monetary incentive which the agency head may otherwise offer under any other provision of law or other authority.

(c) The functions of an agency head under this section shall—

(1) with respect to the judicial branch, be carried out by the Director of the Administrative Office of the United States Courts;

(2) with respect to the House of Representatives, be carried out by the Committee on House Administration of the House of Representatives; and

(3) with respect to the Senate, be carried out by the Committee on Rules and Administration of the Senate.

(d) The President shall designate 1 or more agencies which shall—

(1) prescribe guidelines for programs under this section;

(2) on request, furnish information or technical advice on the design or operation of any program under this section; and

(3) submit to the President and the Congress, before January 1, 1995, and at least every 2 years thereafter, a written report on the operation of this section, including, with respect to the period covered by the report—

(A) the number of agencies offering programs under this section;

(B) a brief description of each of the various programs;

(C) the extent of employee participation in, and the costs to the Government associated with, each of the various programs;

(D) an assessment of any environmental or other benefits realized as a result of programs established under this section; and

(E) any other matter which may be appropriate.